

Trauma Awareness

because recovery from trauma is possible

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)

Because 'self-care' is often not enough

Secondary traumatic stress rates have increased dramatically since COVID and the pressures put on our health care system. Most studies put rates of secondary traumatic stress at about 50% among health care providers. Most literature talks about increasing practices of self-care; what does this mean and does it work? Self-care is critical in ensuring we are taking care of ourselves, but it is often not enough when one is experiencing the impacts of secondary traumatic stress. Often, self-care can be very supportive with preventing secondary traumatic stress - but is not enough to address the symptoms of this. Let's be honest - even when one practices good self-care, there is a high potential of STS ... so self-care is not the remedy.

Recognize triggers

It is important for people to pay attention to their triggers - learn to recognize them. Often we want to avoid or ignore them, but to change our response, we first have to recognize what specifically contributes to distress.

Creating Space

When we think about our best selves in our work, we often think about having space to reflect on our work in meaningful ways - yet in reality, many of us do not do this (for many reasons). If you were to create space to do this - what would it look like? Experiment with it! Notice what happens to your critical thinking.

RESPONSES TO STS

The symptoms of STS can mimic the symptoms of PTSD including intrusive symptoms, avoidance of reminders of the stressors, hyper arousal, recurrent (unwanted) memories, negative changes in thinking/ mood, changes in physical/ emotional reactions.

IMPACT

The impact of STS in the workplace can lead to significant challenges within teams as well as with productivity. Some of the areas that may be impacted include: interpersonal relationships, team morale, team cohesiveness, productivity (including sick time) to name just a few.

ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

There are numerous responses that organizations may enact in order to reduce or mitigate the risks to employees. First, are breaks encouraged? Is the pressure so high that employees feel they do not have time for breaks? Good regular supervision is also important in this process.

Individual considerations with STS

If the answer is not self-care, what do I do?

Although we cannot treat STS with self-care, remember that it is still important to our well-being. Engaging in wellness activities outside of workplaces can create opportunities to increase resilience, reduce emotional impacts of stressful situations, and increase the health of relationships both personally and professionally. Self-care can support some prevention and management of stress, which may contribute to STS. So what do we do? Most large organizations provide opportunities to engage in self-care through accessing benefits. Although these are important to many, most people do not access the resources available to them through these benefits. Find out what resources you have and explore which ones may

benefit you. If you recognize that STS is a significant concern, you may want to reach out to a therapist. Find a therapist that is a good fit for you - this might mean that you have to meet with a couple. Remember - you are worth it!

Some great resources

I always enjoy taking time to share some of my favourite resources:

Books:

Trauma Stewardship - Laura van Dernoot Lipsky
The Age of Overwhelm - Laura van Dernoot Lipsky
The Resilient Practitioner - Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison
Reducing Compassion Fatigue, Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout; a Trauma-Sensitive Workbook - Steele

Apps

Provider Resilience
Breathwork

Recovery from Trauma is Possible

ABOUT ME

Throughout my work I have developed a strong passion around the area of trauma and vicarious trauma. I have worked in the field of Addiction and Mental Health in a variety of roles for 18 years, teaching a sessional class on Trauma and Healing at the University of Lethbridge for several years, along with being in private practice since 2011. I currently instruct in the Child and Youth Care program at the Lethbridge College. I have also had the wonderful opportunity to instruct numerous workshops to a variety of professionals from one hour to two days. I continue to care for myself and my passion in this area through learning and indulging in my curiosity.

tracy.traumatherapist@gmail.com